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RUEHMU/AMEMBASSY MANAGUA PRIORITY 1322
RUEHME/AMEMBASSY MEXICO PRIORITY 3864
RUEHOT/AMEMBASSY OTTAWA PRIORITY 0777
RUEHQ/AMEMBASSY QUITO PRIORITY 2231
RUEHTC/AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE PRIORITY 1026
RUEHROV/AMEMBASSY VATICAN PRIORITY
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK PRIORITY 0335
RUMIAAA/HQ USSOUTHCOM MIAMI FL PRIORITY
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY
RUEHUB/USINT HAVANA PRIORITY 0829
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 CARACAS 001996

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NSC FOR DFISK AND DTOMLINSON

E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/03/2031
TAGS: PGOV PHUM ELAB KDEM SCUL VE

SUBJECT: REQUEST FOR FOLLOW-UP WITH BRV ON EMBASSY SECURITY COORDINATION

REF: CARACAS 1690

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Classified By: Mark Wells, Acting Political Counselor,
for Reason 1.4(b).

THIS IS AN ACTION REQUEST -- SEE PARA 5.

Summary

¶1. (C) Post has attempted to engage locally the Venezuelan Foreign Ministry and National Guard to improve host government response time to demonstrations at the Embassy. This action was prompted by a meager demonstration on June 6 of a few dozen people who were able to hamper Embassy activities for several hours while Venezuelan security forces delayed in responding. The MFA responded rapidly and effectively to our approach, but we have still not seen any response from the National Guard. Post believes it would be beneficial for Department to express our interest in improving security coordination directly to the Venezuelan Embassy in Washington. We do not see the need for an aggressive approach at this time -- points are provided for Department's consideration. End summary.

Background: The Little Demonstration That Could

¶2. (C) As reported in ref, a small group of peaceful demonstrators blocked the Embassy parking lot on the morning of June 6. Unlike many demonstrations that clearly enjoy BRV endorsement (and often funding), this band from Barinas State appeared to be self-initiated, which meant that the National Guard (GN) probably did not have advance warning. The group lacked any real plan for the demonstration, but refused to clear the parking lot entrance unless the Embassy called the media to cover the event. Of course, we did not accede to

their demands, resulting in a stalemate. Despite their scant numbers, the protesters were able to keep traffic closed to vehicles entering and leaving the Embassy.

13. (C) The Venezuelan National Guard (GN), which has responsibility for guarding the Embassy, did not respond quickly and did not initially augment the standard security complement of two GN soldiers. Calls by RSO to the GN went unanswered. Only after the Charge forcefully requested support did a 10-man riot squad appear, three hours into the protest. The Charge also called the MFA, which rapidly dispatched the U.S. desk officer to the Embassy to speak directly with the protestors. With sufficient force, the GN convinced the demonstrators to open the parking lot, and the demonstration quickly dwindled. All told, the tiny demonstration kept normal Embassy traffic in and out of the main gate at a standstill for nearly five hours.

Follow-Up Actions By Embassy

14. (C) Having received no response to calls to the GN, RSO sent a letter to Col. Luis Arrayago, the officer in charge of the unit assigned to guard the Embassy, outlining our concerns and requesting a meeting. (Note: We recall that it took two months for the DISIP to respond to a similar request to discuss the April 7 incident in El Coche when the Ambassador's motorcade was aggressively pursued by motorized protesters.) Separately, on June 22 Poloffs met with MFA officials Yaneth Arocha, office director for Vice Minister Maria Pilar Hernandez, and U.S. Desk Officer Robinson Zapata. Arocha said the MFA had made a significant effort to ensure Embassy security, especially in light of the recent string of demonstrations both against the Ambassador and the Embassy.

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Poloff passed her a copy of the RSO letter to the GN and suggested she prompt them to respond. To date, we have received no response.

Suggested Approach To Venezuelan Embassy

15. (C) ACTION REQUEST: In light of the BRV's slow response, Post believes it would be helpful for the Department to express concerns about security coordination to the Venezuelan Ambassador. Ambassador Alvarez is no doubt pleased with the support provided by U.S. agencies in ensuring the security of Venezuelan diplomatic facilities in the United States, and may get the message that we believe in reciprocating bad Bolivarian behavior. We are not suggesting a tough message, simply a notification that this problem should be improved soonest and implying that Alvarez might take an interest in helping ensure appropriate BRV -- and especially GN -- follow-up. Possible points to make are:

-- We are concerned about the inadequate response of the National Guard units assigned to the U.S. Embassy during a small demonstration on June 6, 2006. Although the demonstration was small, it was able to restrict Embassy functions for nearly five hours by blocking the main entrance.

-- The National Guard did not increase the number of security personnel until nearly three hours into the demonstration, and only after a specific request by the U.S. Charge d'Affaires. We appreciate, however, that the Ministry of Foreign Relations dispatched an officer to help negotiate a solution between the National Guard and the demonstrators.

-- The United States believes in the freedom of expression, including the right to peaceful protest. We will gladly facilitate persons who wish to protest peacefully at our embassies.

-- We are concerned, however, that a small demonstration was permitted to close our Embassy for unreasonable lengths of time. This, in our opinion, runs counter to obligations under the Vienna Convention to safeguard diplomatic facilities. Our governments have a shared interest in facilitating security for embassies and diplomatic personnel.

-- Our Embassy in Caracas has contacted both the National Guard officer responsible for embassy security and the Ministry of Foreign Relations in an effort to improve response time and coordination in the event of similar demonstrations in the future. To date, we have not received a response from the National Guard.

-- We urge your government, namely the National Guard, to work with our personnel at the U.S. Embassy in Caracas to establish the necessary liaisons to ensure better coordination in the future.

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